DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 519 EC 308 276

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|---|---|
| TITLE | Transition and Post-School Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities: Closing the Gaps to Post-Secondary Education and Employment. |
| INSTITUTION | National Council on Disability, Washington, DC. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Social Security Administration (DHEW), Washington, DC. |
| PUB DATE | 2000-11-01 |
| NOTE | 75p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | National Council on Disability, 1331 F Street, NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20004-1107; Tel: 202-272-2004; Web site: http://www.ncd.gov. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Evaluative (142) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC03 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Demonstration Programs; *Disabilities; *Education Work Relationship; Federal Aid; Federal Legislation; *Federal Programs; Financial Support; Postsecondary Education; Program Effectiveness; Secondary Education; Special Education; *Transitional Programs |
| IDENTIFIERS | Individuals with Disabilities Educ Act Amend 1997; Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act; Workforce Investment Act 1998 |

ABSTRACT

This report presents an analysis of research on the state of transition, post-secondary education, and employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities over the past 25 years. It identifies what has worked in the areas of transition planning, services, and supports. It also considers what should work in light of unmet needs and unserved populations, focusing on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Youth Opportunity Movement, Youth Councils and One-Stop Centers under the Workforce Investment Act. Also discussed are the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, and demonstration projects in special education. Recommendations are offered for the nation (eight recommendations), state and local communities (nine recommendations), and the disability community (three recommendations). Major recommendations to the President and U.S. Congress address the following areas: (1) timely reports by agencies on compliance; (2) redesign of programs that are not producing results; (3) cooperation of the Department of Education and Social Security Administration on eligibility and incentives for greater self-sufficiency; (4) development of data and information-sharing across agencies regarding program implementation; (5) diffusion of knowledge about what works; and (6) specific inclusion of individuals with disabilities in federal programs. (DB)

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# Transition and Post-School Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities: Closing the Gaps to Post-Secondary Education and Employment

**National Council on Disability**

**Social Security Administration**

**November 1, 2000**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and the National Council on Disability (NCD) wish to express appreciation to the following Transition-Post School Outcomes report team members who participated in the development of this report:

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We would like to thank all of the participants in the NCD/SSA July 1999 National Forum for their time and energy given to provide guidance for future activities of federal, state, and local entities that will facilitate economic independence for the nation's young people with disabilities.

For their policy review, program and systems' analysis, and comments during the early stages of the project, appreciation is also expressed to:
Andrew Imparato (President and CEO, American Association of People with Disabilities)
Marie P. Strahan (Social Security Administration)
Robert Gropp, Ph.D. (Social Security Administration)
Kathleen Blank (Attorney Advisor, NCD)
Jane West, Ph.D. (Consultant, Chevy Chase, Maryland)
Richard Horne, Ph.D. (U.S. Department of Labor)
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This publication was made possible by funding from the Social Security Administration.

## Table of Contents


Page

Executive Summary..... 3

Introduction..... 13

Transition, Employment and Post-Secondary Research and Findings..... 15

Employment..... 22

Post-Secondary Education..... 30

Social Security. ..... 35

What Works ..... 37

Transition Planning, Services and Supports..... 39

What Should Work ..... 46

The Youth Opportunity Movement..... 47

Workforce Investment Act: Youth Councils and One-Stop Centers..... 48

Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities..... 50

Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act..... 51

Demonstrations Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a High Quality Education..... 55

Conclusions and Recommendations for Action..... 57

Recommendations to the President and the U.S. Congress..... 62

Recommendations to State and Local Entities..... 63

Recommendations to the Disability Community..... 64

REFERENCES..... 65

## Transition and Post -School Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities: Closing the Gaps to Post-Secondary Education and Employment

## Executive Summary

Despite advances in education, disability rights policy, the support of federal mandates, and increased funding of programs and initiatives that impact all youth, the post-school outcomes for far too many of our nation's youth and young adults are still poor. The current status translates not only into untapped talent and potential and unfulfilled dreams, but severely limits America's preparation of today's youth for full participation in tomorrow's society. This report brings attention to persistent issues and problems that various national studies on post-school outcomes document. The problems identified in this report are: (a) poor graduation rates from high school; (b) low employment rates after high school; (c) low post-secondary education participation; and (d) an increasing number of youth receiving Social Security benefits and not leaving the benefits rolls. The outcomes reported through statistics resonate to 30 years ago, prior to the benefit of federal laws and regulations. This is a crisis situation for youth with disabilities. A national initiative that focuses on coordinated actions to address system reform is required. The new system must be effective in changing an antiquated system that has not accomplished widespread and favorable results from the beginning. To minimize continued casualties among youth with disabilities in transition, we must implement a process for reversing historical trends of ineffective transition service planning and provision.

This report presents an analysis of research on the status of transition, post-secondary education, and employment outcomes for primarily 14 to 22 year old youth and young adults with disabilities over the past 25 years. Next it identifies what has worked, and what should work in light of unmet needs and unserved populations. Finally, the report presents recommendations for national, state, and local community action.

In the second half of the 20th Century, there has been a dramatic change in the value of a high school education and diploma. A high school diploma was considered a valued asset in the labor market during the 1950s. By the early 1970s, a high school diploma served as a gateway to many promising career opportunities. Because high school completion and a diploma have become a requirement for pursuing additional education, training, or the labor force, the consequences of leaving high school without a diploma are severe. On average, students who receive special education – like their general education peers – who do not attain diplomas and those who do not complete their high school education are: more likely to be unemployed; more likely to earn less money if, and when, they eventually secure work; and, more likely to receive public assistance than they would if they completed their education and work preparation programs, and attained a high school diploma.

Over the past 25 years federal legislation has been enacted to exact changes in how children and youth with disabilities were educated, engaged in postsecondary education experiences, and prepared for and involved in meaningful employment. Such legislation includes the following: the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Amendments of 1984 (P.L. 98-524) and Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-392), the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988, as amended in 1994 (P.L. 100-407 and P.L. 103-218) (Tech Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-336), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1992 (P.L.101-476) and 1997 (P.L. 105-17), the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (P.L.103-239), the Higher Education Act of 1998 (P.L.105-244) including a new program for Higher Education Access for Students with Disabilities (Part D of Title VII), the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments (P.L. 105-166), the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-220), and the 1999 Ticket to Work

and Work Incentives Improvement Act (P.L. 106-170). The Rehabilitation Act amendments also focused attention on the Congressional intent regarding national level leadership that is needed for coordination across programs, initiatives, and services. It established special responsibilities for the Secretary of Education to coordinate all activities with respect to individuals with disabilities across programs administered by the Federal Government. Neither the extent, effectiveness of carrying out this requirement, nor its impact on the way students with disabilities exit high school is clear at this time.

Chief among these various pieces of federal legislation is IDEA, its transition services requirements, and related provisions of the 1997 IDEA amendments. School districts are required to assess each student's ability to meet post-graduation goals and to consider individual transition services needs, not relying upon general services and/or supports the school may already have in place. The 1997 IDEA amendments require an individualized education program (IEP) team to formulate a statement of each student's transition service needs focusing on which courses will be necessary to help the student achieve long-term vocational goals by the time a student turns 14 years old. By age 16 (or younger, if the IEP team determines that it is appropriate), the specific transition services necessary to accomplish those vocational goals must be addressed through IEP team transition service planning. Transition services are defined as a coordinated set of activities "designed within an outcome oriented process" and aimed at promoting each student's movement from school to post-school activities. These activities may include: Post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, adult education, independent living and community participation.

Although IDEA may be considered the chief entitlement law for children and youth with disabilities, it is not their only federal civil rights protection. However, youth and their families are not sufficiently aware that children, youth, and adults with disabilities are also



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protected against discrimination and that youth and adults are provided access to rehabilitation services, if needed for employment, under the Rehabilitation Act. While this law has been on the books more than a quarter of a century, administration of its multiple sections is the responsibility of different federal entities. Who administers what is unclear to some stakeholders and becomes important information when laws are not always fully and effectively carried out by state and local entities. The Rehabilitation Act incorporates provisions for determining individual need for vocational rehabilitation training to assist with reaching a desired employment outcome.

How well has America met the education and employment needs of youth through its education and disability policy, legislative provisions and initiatives geared to prepare youth for success in the digital economy, to decrease drop out rates, and to increase graduation rates? In terms of preparing youth with disabilities for the digital economy, according to a nationally representative survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000) of 1,000 school administrators about the use of telecommunications in their school:

- 65% of public schools had internet access;
- 73% of these school indicated that students had access to the internet either through e-mail, newsgroups or the web;
- 47% of schools indicated that the major barrier to student use of telecommunications was that special education teachers were not being sufficiently trained in the technology;
- 34% of schools cited not having enough computers available to students with disabilities;
- 38% of schools reported not having enough computers with alternative input/output devices for students with disabilities; and
- 39% of schools indicated that there were inadequate evaluation and support services to meet the special technology needs of students with disabilities.

These data present a picture that leaves much to be done in the area of telecommunications access and personnel training.

In school year 1996, there were 441,812 students reported to have exited special education in the United States and outlying areas. In 1997, that number increased to 463,025

students. In school year 1998, that number increased to 486,625 students. The following statistics provide information on the 'Basis of Exit' data reported over the last 3 years by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.

**Basis of Exit for Students Who Receive Special Education**

**In the United States During the 1996 to 1998 School Years**

| School Year | % Students 14 Yrs. And Older Who Exit with Diplomas | % Students 14 Yrs. and Older Who Drop Out | % Students Who Moved, Not Known To Continue | % Students 14 Yrs. And Older Who Returned to Regular Education | IDEA Annual Report Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1996** | 27 | 17 | 13 | 15 | **1998** |
| **1997** | 27 | 18 | 12 | 14 | **1999** |
| **1998** | 27 | 17 | 13 | 12 | **2000** |

Note: Data derived from Tables AD1 of the 19th, 20th, and 21st Annual Reports to the U.S. Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The diploma rates were basically static at 27% for school years 1996, 1997 and 1998. Drop out rates remained static during that three-year period. The percentage of students who left the system and were reported as "not known to continue" remained static.

Out-of-school youth (i.e., 'drop outs' and those 'not known to continue') comprise almost one-third of all secondary-aged students who exit the system. We, as a nation, do not really know what happens to those 150,000 or so former students. It is not clear how many go on to jobs, to college, or how many wind up on welfare rolls. Unfortunately, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty from year to year. But each year now for the next 10 years we may witness a steady increase in the overall numbers of youth and young adults who disappear from our 'radar screens' because they have dropped out and/or exited for unknown reasons.

When state-by-state data (from the 21st Annual Report on IDEA) for "Basis of Exit-Exiting with Diploma" are viewed geographically, the following observations can be made:

- Graduation with diploma rates range from a low of 7% for the state of Mississippi to a high of 81% for the state of Texas;
- The southeastern most portion of the United States has the largest cluster of states (i.e., Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina) with the lowest graduation by diploma rates that range from 7% to 20%; and
- One cluster of four states (i.e., Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey) has some of the highest graduation by diploma rates, ranging from 37% to 47%.

These data show a pattern of graduation rates across the south east that are much lower than both the low rate for students who received special education and students in the general population nationwide. More specifically, other national research data indicate that while only 27% of students who receive special education graduate with diplomas, 75% of their peers in general education – who do not receive special education—graduate with diplomas (NCES, 2000; DoED, 1999). Only 27% of those who complete high school are enrolled in post-secondary education compared to 68% of the general student population. And, three to five years after exiting high school, only a little more than half are found to be employed compared to 69% of their peers (Fabian, Lent & Willis, 1998).

An increasing number of youth with disabilities apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) each year. According to the Social Security Administration in 1999, approximately 75,000 individuals between 18 and 24 years of age were awarded SSI or SSDI benefits, and as of June 2000 about 355,000 persons aged 18-24 were receiving SSI or SSDI benefits. Of these about 36,000 were getting benefits from both programs. (Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 1999). Recent reports about the work patterns of disability insurance beneficiaries showed mixed information. For example, that among SSDI recipients, less than one percent of recipients who continue to meet SSA's definition of disability ever leave the program to return to work (Ross, 1996), only 12% of

the beneficiaries who were not previously working start jobs while receiving benefits (Hennessey, 1996), 43.8% of people with disabilities ages 18 to 34 tend to stop working (Hennessey, 1997). On the other hand, when compared to untrained people, youth with vocational or job training were less likely to stop work and return to SSDI rolls than were older disability insurance beneficiaries (Dykacz, 1998).

Differences in public policies and programs, however, may account in part, for: (1) the growth by younger entrants to the SSI and SSDI rolls; and (2) apparent confusion about eligibility and program purposes. For example, technical assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) through the National Transition Alliance (e.g., Halloran and Austin, 1998:p.3; NTN, 1998) staunchly promotes application to the SSI program by youth in special education. This raises concerns about schools encouraging "students with certain disabilities" to apply for SSI. This strategy could be viewed as inconsistent with the IDEA requirement for services based on each child's individual need, rather than on a category or type of disability. OSEP is required by IDEA to implement "transition" policies and programs that are designed to promote successful transition of youth from secondary school to the world of work and adult life. At the same time, SSA is required by the Social Security Act to implement policies and programs that provide cash benefit to children and youth whose disability prevents their employment. The eligibility requirements are different for children and adults. To become enrolled, that is, to be determined eligible by SSA, youth over 18 years of age must present themselves as being unable to be employed. At the very minimum, these public policies and their interpretation appear to be in direct conflict.

A report entitled *The Summary of Data on Young People with Disabilities* (NIDRR & SSA 1999) drew on data from sources such as the National Health Interview Survey, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Current Population Survey, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation. Statistics included in the *Summary Data Highlights* indicated that:

- Among the 25.1 million people 15 to 21 years of age, 12.1 percent have a disability, and 3.2 percent have a severe disability.

- The head of household's educational attainment was significantly lower for youth with disabilities. Parents or guardians who had not completed high school were heads of household for 41 percent of youth with disabilities. By comparison, the heads of households who had not completed high school for youth ages 12 to 17 in the general population was 22 percent.

- Typical household income in families with youth with disabilities was considerably lower than for youth in the general population. For 35 percent of the youth with disabilities, household income was less than $12,500, compared with the general population of youth age 12 to 17, where 18 percent of the households had incomes of less than $12,500. For households including youth with disabilities, 68 percent of the households had incomes of less than $25,000, while in the general population households with youth, only 18 percent had incomes of less than $25,000.

In addition to the discouraging reports on prevalence, NCD indicated in 2000, in a report entitled *Back to School on Civil Rights*, the following data about noncompliance with the IDEA:

> The largest areas of noncompliance were general supervision, where 90 percent, or 45 states, failed to ensure compliance, and transition, where 88 percent, or 44 states, failed to ensure compliance (p. 89); and
>
> Specific transition requirements and the percentage of states in noncompliance were listed as – meeting participants (76% or 38 states), notice (70% or 35 states), and statement of needed services (68% or 34 states).

After reviewing all of the data described above, it should be no surprise that transition and post-school outcomes for youth are poor.

NCD urges the President and the Congress to ensure that the tools necessary for obtaining education and employment goals are provided to today's youth who will shape our nation's future. In the spirit of hope and with the expectation that many segments of American society have a stake in ensuring successful transitions for youth and young adults, NCD makes a number of recommendations for action at the local, state, and national level. Overall, NCD's recommendations for action at the state, local, and community level underscore the need to remove administrative disincentives for collaboration and coordination of efforts; document and share information about what works, including integration of preparation for transition into daily

school life and greater involvement of community resources at all levels, and innovation in ways of reaching diverse cultures, underserved and unserved populations. More specifically, NCD's recommendations to the President and the U.S. Congress include the need to:

1. Establish a timeline for reports to Congress and the public on the review, revision and/or refinement of all relevant federal agencies' compliance and enforcement of programs that involve youth and young adults with disabilities. Include that each agency must provide clear and distinct incentives for compliance and enforcement, and specific and immediate sanctions for noncompliance and lack of enforcement, whenever necessary.

2. Require that all federal agencies redesign and/or redirect regional grants, contracts and/or cooperative agreements that are not producing results for youth and young adults with disabilities in secondary education, career training and employment preparation, and post-secondary education areas. Establish a timeline for carrying out the work and reporting the revisions.

3. Direct the Department of Education and the Social Security Administration to work together to: (a) set forth clear guidelines on the interpretation of the definitions of common terms in the federal laws impacting youth transitioning from high school; and (b) jointly fund and commission a national study for review and analysis of the SSI program purposes and the IDEA program purposes in relation to transitioning youth and young adults. One outcome of that study could be the design of a combined program with links to work incentive programs and other efforts that can lead to greater self-sufficiency for youth and young people with disabilities.

4. Ensure that the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Interior, and Labor, the Small Business Administration, Health Care Financing Administration, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Social Security Administration develop and implement actions needed to build and reinforce data – and information-sharing crosswalks within and across executive, legislative, and judicial branch agencies regarding the implementation of programs that involve youth and young adults with disabilities.

5. Ensure that the interagency coordination among the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Interior, and Labor, the Small Business Administration, Health Care Financing Administration, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Social Security Administration promote the infusion of knowledge about what works regarding transition and post-school services and supports for youth and young adults within and across all areas of federal, state, and local governments, public-private partnerships focusing on school and workplace improvements, and among all of America's citizens. Collect and disseminate timely and useful data and information about successful and unsuccessful strategies for youth and young adults with disabilities. Information needs to be meaningful to youth with disabilities, their

families and the general public. Designate the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities Subcommittee on Expanding the Employment of Youth with Disabilities for the leadership of this effort.

6. Ensure that all Department of Education and Department of Labor youth initiative grants, programs, and initiatives include dollars and resources for individuals with disabilities. A first step should authorize the Department of Education to implement a post-secondary education initiative that incorporates targeted scholarships and/or loans for youth and young adults with disabilities. Require that the initiative will provide effective outreach recruitment, relevant follow-along supports, and reasonable financial terms for repayment, when necessary.

## Introduction

Each year tens of thousands of young people under the age of 30 come onto the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) programs and the majority of them never leave. A significant portion of the SSI youth caseload includes youth with disabilities from diverse cultures and youth with mental illness. These findings resulted in an interagency agreement between the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the National Council on Disability (NCD) in August 1998. SSA and NCD entered this agreement to support a national policy review and July 1999 forum designed to analyze the development and implementation of public policy in federal and state programs impacting career planning, employment opportunity and employment outcomes for young people with disabilities. Based upon the analysis of research data and information generated through the forum, this joint SSA and NCD report was commissioned.

Young people with disabilities were not moving successfully from high school to post secondary education or employment. Differences in public policies and programs, however, may account in part, for: (1) the growth by younger entrants to the SSI and SSDI rolls; and (2) apparent confusion about eligibility and program purposes. For example, technical assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) through the National Transition Alliance staunchly promotes such growth (e.g., Halloran and Austin, 1998, p.3; NTN, 1998). This raises concerns about schools encouraging "students with certain disabilities" to apply for SSI. The strategy may also be seen as inconsistent with the IDEA requirement for services based on each child's individual need, rather than on a category or type of disability. At the same time, OSEP is required by IDEA to implement "transition" policies and programs that are designed to promote successful transition of youth from secondary school to the world of work and adult life. On the other hand, SSA is required by law to implement policies and programs that benefit children and youth whose disability prevents their employment. To become enrolled, to be determined eligible by SSA, children and youth must

present themselves as being unable to be employed. At the very minimum, these public policies and their interpretation appear to be in direct conflict with each other.

The number, size, complexity, and seeming extension into the future of many of our nation's issues surrounding secondary and postsecondary public education and post-high school employment for youth and young adults are imposing. A number of factors caused the SSA and NCD to look at these issues in relation to youth and young adults with disabilities in America.

First, the overall numbers of children and youth served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has increased to about 6,000,000 students. Of that number, nearly 45 percent are engaged in secondary school programs, and the numbers and ages of secondary school youth are expected to continue to increase until the year 2010. Unfortunately, there continues to be a lack of appropriate services, supports and/or post high school assistance to meet the educational and/or career training needs of teenagers and young adults.

Second, the total number of 18-to-24 year olds in the nation's population will rise steadily through the year 2010 outstripping the rate of growth for those 25 years and older. Racial and ethnic diversity will increase, as will job competition from young, foreign immigrants. Youth labor markets will be subjected to renewed pressures, and young adults will become susceptible to increasing demands for advanced skills (e.g., information technology) by industry.

Third, the number of out-of-school youth is steadily increasing, creating a pool of marginalized, unemployed, underemployed, and able obtain jobs that use the existing skills of youth and young adults with disabilities. While this pool of youth and young adults is growing considerably larger each year, there is a conspicuous absence of attention and resources by

policymakers that is brought to bear on their situation. Currently, an estimated15 million youths ages 16-24 are out of school. Out of those 15 million, 70 percent have a high school diploma or less education. It is estimated that America loses $88 billion for each year's class of high school dropouts. These 15 million young people form a major source of human capital for the next century.

Fourth, there has been a dramatic increase in children and younger entrants to the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and programs from 1975 to 1993 that has resulted in an increase in the expected duration recipients remain in the programs (Social Security Administration, 1996). While rates in children and younger entrants to SSDI and SSI programs since 1993 have not been as dramatic, there has been a slow and steady growth in the overall numbers of young entrants. Coupled with a miniscule 'return-to-work' rate, particularly among SSDI beneficiaries, this situation contributes to an increase in the overall numbers of underemployed and unemployed youth and young adults in this nation.

**Transition, Employment and Post-Secondary Education Research and Findings**

Historically, transition problems that followed students' graduation were demonstrated in the data on access to and results of services to adults with severe disabilities. For example, in one follow-up study of high school graduates before IDEA changed the configuration of special education programs, Stansfield (1976) found that 40 percent of graduates were receiving no vocational services and that 94 percent continued to live at home with their parents. In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), identified the transition from school to work as one of the major federal priorities of special education programs across the nation (Will, 1983). The decision to develop this school-to-work transition initiative was prompted by numerous studies and reports conducted during the early 1980s, which uniformly found high levels of unemployment, economic instability and



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dependence, and social isolation among young adults with disabilities (e.g., Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Schalock, Wolzen, Feis, Werbel & Peterson, 1984).

Beginning in 1985, significant research and demonstration activities were initiated for the explicit purpose of improving the transition of youth with disabilities from school to work, post-secondary education, and community living (Leach & Harmon, 1993). For the approximately 250,000 to 300,000 students who exited their public special education programs each year, the transition policy initiative was an attempt to focus the nation's resources and vision to help those students achieve valued adult lifestyles. Throughout the 1980s, school-to-work transition services for youth with disabilities expanded, principally emphasizing (a) state and local efforts to improve the high school curriculum to address students' development of functional skills for work and community living; (b) opportunities for students to learn in real-world contexts (i.e., work sites and other community-based settings); (c) increased student and family participation in the development of transition plans focused on a range of post-school outcomes in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, and community living; and (d) concerted efforts to increase the level and intensity of interagency cooperation among educators, employers, and community service agencies in addressing the transition needs of secondary students with disabilities.

The results of other post-school follow-up studies suggested that students with disabilities had a very difficult time adjusting to life after graduation from high school. During their final years in school, these youth remain dependent on IEP teams to make decisions, assess performance, and make linkages with service agencies (Chadsky-Rusch, Rusch & O'Reilly, 1991). Rarely were they taught, required, or invited to advocate their own interests (Mithaug, Martin, Agran & Rusch, 1988). The unemployment, under education, and continued substantial dependence on parents; social isolation; and lack of involvement in community-oriented

activities characteristic of many individuals with disabilities are factors that foster continued dependence among youth in transition.

In 1989, NCD published its first study of public education, *The Education of Students with Disabilities: Where Do We Stand?* In that report NCD found that:

> Upon leaving school students with disabilities and their families often have a difficult time accessing appropriate adult services and/or postsecondary education and training programs (p. 40).
>
> Effective transition planning for high school students with disabilities can facilitate their success in adult life (p. 41).
>
> Graduates with disabilities are more likely to be employed following school if (1) comprehensive vocational training is a primary component of their high school program and (2) they have a job secured at the time of graduation (p. 42).
>
> There are insufficient partnerships between the business community and schools for the purpose of enhancing employment opportunities for students with disabilities (p. 43). and
>
> Parent participation during high school facilitates the successful transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life (p. 44).

Beginning in 1991, OSERS initiated a new discretionary grant system for states to overhaul and expand transition services to youth with disabilities. Statewide systems change transition projects were required to focus on six common elements: (a) individualized education program (IEP)/transition planning; (b) assessment; (c) student empowerment; (d) parent and family involvement; (e) curriculum and instruction change; and (f) school-community coordination. These statewide system change transition projects were funded on five-year cycles; states also received technical assistance and evaluation services from the National Transition Network, a nationwide consortium of universities. It was not clear which, if any, of the state funded systems change projects resulted in exemplary state programs – which were replicated – or produced the outcomes desired by students, families, advocates, and policy makers.

In response to concerns about major national school reform activities, NCD returned to the issue of public education in the report *Serving the Nation's Students with Disabilities:*

*Progress and Prospects* (1993). In this report NCD focused on a range of issues including outcomes for students who receive special education in relation to students who receive general education only. A substantial amount of the data and findings from this report indicated significant differences existed between the two groups with respect to: Diploma Attainment rankings (pp. 76-77); National Assessment of Educational Progress math and reading scores ( pp. 78-80); and, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores (p. 74). In every instance, students who received special education and related services performed worse than their general education peers in academic performance areas. Major within-state discrepancies were noted in terms of diploma rates between students who received special education and students who received general education, only.

During the same period, other reviews and evaluations of school-to-work (Kazdis & Barton, 1993), and vocational training programs (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994; General Accounting Office, 1993) concluded that the intended outcomes were still not being achieved. National criticism was also expressed in relation to individual federal employment training programs such as vocational rehabilitation (General Accounting Office, 1993) and the Job Training Partnership Act (General Accounting Office, 1993), as well as the group of 154 employment training programs funded at $25 billion annually in the U.S. and run by 14 federal departments and agencies (General Accounting Office, 1994). Some professionals charged that federal, state, and local governments did not have coordinated and targeted existing practices and policies that could directly maximize the power of transition and supported employment (Mank, 1994).

Few of the ongoing research, reviews, and evaluations of transition efforts have addressed the unique problems for youth in rural areas, including tribal communities. Some of the findings from the literature on rural school systems are also applicable to some tribal

communities. For example, several researchers (Griffin, cited in Revell, Inge, Mank and Wehman, 1999; Gold & Williams, 1998) identified barriers to transitioning youth to employment and post secondary education that included geographic distance and lack of accessible public transportation, a waiting list for services, and continued stereotyping of people with disabilities. Many of the transition services and planning needs in rural schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) are within the responsibility of the U.S. Departments of Education and the Interior to address. Other BIA and tribal community issues, concerns, and findings have also been raised that are beyond the scope of this report and merit further attention.

In its 21st Annual Report to the U.S. Congress on the Implementation of the IDEA, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs included an "Interim Report From the National Assessment" based on the 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA (DoED, 2000). The IDEA amendments of 1997 direct the Department of Education to assess the impact and effectiveness of State and local efforts to provide a free appropriate public education to children and youth with disabilities (DoED, 2000: Section IV, p. 43). In this section, the Office of Special Education Programs reports that it has found "that the requirements of the law with the strongest links to improved educational results for students with disabilities include those addressing...the provision of transition services to enable students with disabilities to move effectively from school to post-school independence and achievement (Section IV, p. 44). In a subsequent sub-section, spanning 20 pages, entitled "Progress in Implementing the Transition Requirements of IDEA: Promising Strategies and Future Directions" the report acknowledges that after nearly 10 years of effort to implement the transition service requirements of federal law:

> "Although IDEA's mandate for transition planning presents a host of challenges that have been addressed with varying degrees of success in State departments, schools, and communities across the United States, some States and localities have in fact made substantial progress in their efforts to implement the IDEA requirement (Section IV, p.55).

This statement appears to be a delicate way of informing readers that after 10 years, the Department of Education's transition initiative has not met with the degree of success expected, hoped, and needed.

Indeed, we can see problems in trend data from the last three Annual Reports to Congress. The Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Office of Special Education Programs reported the *Basis of Exit* data below.

**Basis of Exit for Students Who Receive Special Education**

**In the United States During the 1996 to 1998 School Years**

| School Year | % Students 14 Yrs. And Older Who Exit with Diplomas | % Students 14 Yrs. and Older Who Drop Out | % Students Who Moved, Not Known To Continue | % Students 14 Yrs. And Older Who Returned to Regular Education | IDEA Annual Report Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1996** | 27 | 17 | 13 | 15 | **1998** |
| **1997** | 27 | 18 | 12 | 14 | **1999** |
| **1998** | 27 | 17 | 13 | 12 | **2000** |

Note: Data derived from Tables AD1 of the 19th, 20th, and 21st Annual Reports to the U.S. Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The exit data above show that the high school diploma rates are basically static at 27 percent for the three school years 1996, 1997 and 1998. Drop out rates and the percentage of students who left the system and were reported as 'not known to continue' also showed little change. The rate of return to regular education decreased 3 percent. In addition, when other data on the Department of Education's state-by state information (from the 21st Annual Report on IDEA) for "Basis of Exit—Exiting with Diploma" are viewed geographically, the following observations about youth with disabilities can be made:

- Graduation with diploma rates range from a low of 7 percent for the state of Mississippi to a high of 81 percent for the state of Texas;
- The southeastern most portion of the United States has the largest cluster of states (i.e., Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina) with the lowest graduation by diploma rates that range from 7 percent to 20 percent; and
- One cluster of four states (i.e., Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey) has some of the highest graduation by diploma rates, ranging from 37 percent to 47 percent.

There were unexplained regional differences in rates of graduation with diplomas that call attention to how poorly a number of southeastern states are faring compared to other regions of the country for both the general population and youth who received special education. For example, all of the states in the southeastern cluster had rates of graduation with a diploma that were below the national figures for youth with disabilities and for their peers. According to national data sources, only 27 percent of students who receive special education graduate with diplomas compared to 75 percent of their peers in general education–students who do not receive special education (NCES, 2000; DoED, 1999).

As early as possible, while still in school, a number of youth with disabilities need help entering the rehabilitation service system. The Rehabilitation Amendments of 1992 were intended not only to provide easier access, but also to bring together rehabilitation and education services. The following Congressional intent for coordination still has not become a reality at most state and local levels:

> "The Committee wishes to reiterate that the vocational rehabilitation program should use information from the public schools if that information reflects the current status and abilities of the student. Coordination between agencies regarding the adequacy of data needed by each agency will save time and money. The Committee also intends that the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan [IWRP] be coordinated with an individualized education program for such students with disabilities."

". . . to ensure that all students who require VR services receive those services in a timely manner . . . There should be no gap in services between the education system and the VR system. Thus, an individual's IWRP should be completed before the individual leaves the school system...The committee intends that transition services be available not only to those students in special education programs, but also to students with disabilities who are in regular education programs." (Senate Report 102-357, pp.33-34.)

In January of 2000, in response to an increasing volume of parent complaints and concerns, NCD issued *Back to School on Civil Rights*, a comprehensive study of IDEA-related federal monitoring and enforcement activities for the period 1975 to 1997. Chief among its findings were that:

> The largest areas of noncompliance were general supervision, where 90 , or 45 states, failed to ensure compliance, and transition, where 88 , or 44 states, failed to ensure compliance (p. 89); and
>
> Specific transition requirements and the age of states found in noncompliance were listed as – required meeting participants (76 percent or 38 states), transition services as a purpose included in the meeting notice (70 percent or 35 states), and statement of needed transition services (68 percent or 34 states).

In the face of the data provided on transition needs, it should come as no surprise that an overwhelming number of youth with disabilities are under educated, under qualified for today's job market or unemployed, and unprepared for the rigors of post-secondary education.

**Employment.** In 1989, the Stanford Research Institute conducted the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS). The NLTS included 8,000 youth ages 13-21 who were enrolled in secondary schools during the 1985-86 school year and had left school by 1987. Students were interviewed for the study at two intervals: 1) two years or less post-school, and 2) at three to five years post-school. The results of the NLTS included the following highlights:

- As shown in the chart below, the competitive employment rate for youth with disabilities was at least 10 percent lower at three to five years after high school than it was at the two-year point. The rate for youth in the general population did not reflect the same decrease.

| YOUTH GROUP | TWO YEARS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL | THREE TO FIVE YEARS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL |
|---|---|---|
| General Population | 59% competitively employed | 46% competitively employed |
| Youth with Disabilities | 69% competitively employed | 59% competitively employed |

- The study also revealed that employment rates differed across types of disabilities. Students with learning disabilities and speech impairments were employed at the same rate as youth in the general population at three to five years after high school, but the picture was more devastating for youth with other disabilities, as shown in the chart below.

| DISABILITY | THREE TO FIVE YEARS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL |
|---|---|
| Visual | 29% competitively employed |
| Orthopedic | 22% competitively employed |
| Multiple disabilities | 17% competitively employed |

- The NLTS data also disclosed differences in employment rates among students with disabilities based on how they exited high school, as presented below.

| METHOD OF HIGH SCHOOL EXIT | TWO YEARS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL | THREE TO FIVE YEARS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL |
|---|---|---|
| Graduated | 7% competitively employed | 42% competitively employed |
| Dropped out | 12% competitively employed | 38% competitively employed |
| Reached age beyond IDEA service | 13% competitively employed | 25% competitively employed |

The data above indicate that the students with disabilities who had graduated from high school were more likely to be employed at three to five years after leaving high school.

- Other NLTS data disclosed gender and culture differences–males were more likely to be competitively employed than females and received 50 percent more in wages; African American students with disabilities were more likely to be employed at three to five years post-school than at two years after leaving school; whereas, white and Hispanic students showed only slight increases in three to five years. However, white and Hispanic students' wages increased substantially while African American students' wages increased slightly between the time of the first and second follow-up;

Of interest to note also was that hourly wages for youth with disabilities increased 40 percent during the first and second interviews; both students who graduated and students who dropped out had a 27 percent increase in wages during the study, while youth who reached the maximum age for IDEA services (and did not graduate), did not have such increases in wages.

In 1996, NCD released *Cognitive Impairments and the Application of Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act*, a policy and program analysis that included a review of multiple pieces of legislation regarding transition and supported employment. A chief finding from this research endeavor was that:

> From the data and analyses presented in this section, it appears that at least three sets of interrelated conditions exist related to poor outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities. First, many youths and young adults with disabilities apparently do not learn and use the skills they need to achieve productivity, empowerment, and independence. Second, service programs and environments may not be providing the types of reasonable accommodations necessary to support youths and young adults with disabilities in training or employment situations. Third, the absence of a comprehensive national policy and services system to help youths with disabilities move into responsible adulthood may be a contributing factor to these disappointing results. These conditions will be rectified, it is hoped, by building on and redirecting attention to existing practices and policy provisions and by the current Administration's efforts involving intergovernmental education and labor reform (p. 22).

The disability community raised concerns about the major policy barriers and disincentives to employment that people with disabilities, including youth and young people, continually encountered. NCD addressed these concerns through its report *Removing Barriers To Work: Action Proposals for the 105th Congress and Beyond* (NCD, 1997). *Removing Barriers To Work* identified major barriers preventing SSI and SSDI beneficiaries from becoming more self-sufficient through employment. The barriers identified were applicable to youth and young people with disabilities as well and included that:

- Many people would be worse off financially if they worked and earned to their potential than if they did not work. (p. 5)

- People with disabilities cannot choose their own vocational rehabilitation program. (p. 6)
- People with disabilities lack employment opportunities. (p. 7)

Concerns about factors and barriers that impact the employment status of youth with disabilities were included in a number of reports released since the mid-1990s. Among these were concerns about limited preparation for the digital economy and methods of exiting high school as factors that impact the employment status of youth and disabilities. Highlights from three such reports included data on access to and use of telecommunications in public schools, and the types of high school exit for students who received special education.

In terms of youth and young adults' preparation for the digital economy, according to a nationally representative survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000) of 1,000 school administrators about the use of telecommunications in their school, 65 percent of public schools had Internet access and students at 73 percent of these schools had access to the Internet either through e-mail, newsgroups or the web. However, information reported for students with disabilities, depicts major barriers, as follows.

| % of SCHOOLS | MAJOR BARRIERS TO ACCES/USE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS BY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES |
|---|---|
| 47% | Special education teachers were sufficiently trained |
| 39% | Inadequate evaluation and support services to meet needs |
| 38% | Not enough computers with alternative input/output devices |
| 34% | Not enough computers available to students with disabilities |

These NCES findings were similar to issues and barriers identified in other recent reports concerned with the status of all people with disabilities in the digital economy. Two of these

reports were released in May 2000. One report, a paper commissioned by the National Science Foundation, *The Growing Digital Divide in Access for People With Disabilities: Overcoming Barriers to Participation in the Digital Economy* (Waddell, 2000) was presented at a national conference on understanding the digital economy. The researcher stated "Unless the civil rights of America's 54 million people with disabilities are address during this period of rapid, technological development, the community will be locked out from participation on the basis of disability and the technological world will not be enriched by their diverse contributions. The impact is systemic and reaches all sectors of our economy, whether or not the participant is a consumer, business owner, employee, educator, student, parent, child or citizen. Specific digital economy barriers need to be addressed in our research in order to inform our civil rights laws and public policy" (p. 1). Along similar lines were NCD's findings about access in its report, *Federal Policy Barriers to Assistive Technology* (NCD, 2000). The NCD report disclosed that "Existing laws and policies that fund assistive technology have gaps that fail to address the needs of many individuals with disabilities. In addition, the laws and policies are frequently misinterpreted or implemented inappropriately by those charged with service delivery and oversight. Federal agencies and others that implement federal policy (such as states and local agencies) commonly lack the expertise and resources necessary to implement existing [assistive technology laws] and policies" (p. 7).

This brings us to related concerns about the extent to which youth with disabilities are exiting high school prepared for full participation in the digital economy and other aspects of adult living. According to recent reports issued by the U.S. Department of Education, the students who exited special education in the United States and outlying areas were 441,812 in 1996. The numbers increased to 463,025 in 1997 and 486,625 in 1998.

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Information about how youth and young adults have fared overall is disturbing. The National Organization on Disability began releasing reports on work and the overall quality of life was apparent from review of the *National Organization on Disability/Harris 1998 Survey of Americans with Disabilities.* The nationwide survey of 1,000 Americans with disabilities aged 16 and older reported that Americans with disabilities continued to lag well behind other Americans in many of the most basic aspects of life, as previous Harris studies found in 1994 and 1986. The researchers concluded that large gaps still exist between people with disabilities and the general population with regard to employment, education, income, frequency of socializing and ten other major "indicator" areas of life. Furthermore, they reported, most of these gaps show little evidence of narrowing. In some cases, the gaps have even widened. The researchers also noted that employment continued to be the area with the widest gulf between people with disabilities, including youth, and the general population. Only three in ten working-age people with disabilities were employed full or part-time, compared to eight in ten people in the general population. Working age people with disabilities were no more likely to be employed today than they were a decade ago, even though almost three out of four who are not working say that they would prefer to be working. This low rate of employment has, in turn, led to an income gap that has not narrowed since 1986. As such, one in three people with disabilities, including youth and young people, compared to just one in eight other Americans, live in very low income households with less than $15,000 in annual income. These findings were consistent reports by a different group of researchers who studied high school exit data. Fabian, Lent, and Willis (1998) found that three to five years after high school a little more than half of youth with disabilities were employed compared to 69 percent of their peers.

In addition to the aforementioned general employment issues and concerns that pose barriers for many people in the larger disability community, youth with disabilities from at least

two segments of the disability community also face other challenges. These include people from (1) diverse cultures and (2) people with developmental disabilities.

What does the employment picture show for people with disabilities, including youth and young adults, from diverse cultures? NCD reported in *Lift Every Voice: Modernizing Disability Policies and Programs to Serve a Diverse Nation* (1999) that while the general labor force participation rate for people 18 to 64 years old is nearly 83 percent, it is about 52 percent for those with disabilities, including youth. However, only about 38.6 percent of those with disabilities from diverse cultures are in the labor force (p.5). As shown in the chart below, the picture is more dismal for people with severe disabilities.

| GROUP | PEOPLE WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES EMPLOYED |
|---|---|
| White | 30 % of population subgroup |
| Hispanic/Latino | 21.2% of population subgroup |
| Black | 17.8% of population subgroup |

The same NCD report also revealed that in many diverse cultural groups, family members of people with disabilities have unique needs and confront unique barriers to employment. Barriers such as the lack of after-school childcare have a direct impact on the provision of services for the family member with a disability. On a broad scale, the needs of family members have not been incorporated into the larger disability policy agenda. This failure has also had adverse effects on the lives of people with disabilities from diverse cultures. Overall, data on the employment status of many people with disabilities, including youth, from diverse cultures (e.g., Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, Alaska Natives, and the multiple Asian American and Pacific Islander subgroups), are sparse when compared to data available on the larger population of people with disabilities.

What do we know about the recent employment status of Americans with developmental disabilities, including youth and young adults? A report entitled *The Summary of Data on Young People with Disabilities* (NIDRR & SSA 1999) drew on data from sources such as the National Health Interview Survey, the National Center for Education Statistics, the Current Population Survey, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation. Statistics included in the *Summary Data Highlights* indicated:

- Among the 25.1 million people 15 to 21 years of age, 12.1 percent have a disability, and 3.2 percent have a severe disability.

- The head of household's educational attainment was significantly lower for youth with disabilities. Parents or guardians who had not completed high school were heads of household for 41 percent of youth with disabilities. By comparison, the heads of households who had not completed high school for youth ages 12 to 17 in the general population was 22 percent.

- Typical household income in families with youth with disabilities was considerably lower than for youth in the general population, as shown below.

| ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME | YOUTH AGES 12-17 WITH DISABILITIES | GENERAL YOUTH POPULATION AGES 12-17 |
|---|---|---|
| Less than $12,500 | 35% of households | 18% of households |
| Less than $25,000 | 68% of households | 18% of households |

Another 1999 report released by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reached some troubling conclusions. The OIG found that while State developmental disabilities councils do not obtain direct employment for persons with developmental disabilities, they facilitate job opportunities for them by funding demonstration projects for promising employment practices. The OIG also found that key factors in creating and maintaining jobs for persons with developmental disabilities include: involvement of the employer community, collaborative arrangements among State entities, and planning for long-term support systems. In addition, the OIG found that outcome data to assess the success or effectiveness of employment programs, despite federal and/or state information

requirements (e.g., through the Government Performance Results Act) are generally not available. Furthermore, the OIG found that the data that are available are limited and inconsistent from State to State.

In summary, data on the employment of youth with disabilities show little change in the status of those who exit school prepared to enter the work force. There is also the unlikelihood of youth without a high school diploma being employed three to five years after high school–those who exit by dropping out or not-known-to-continue. The findings on the employment status of youth with disabilities point to a lack of appropriate preparation, transition planning, services, and linkages prior to high school exit. In addition, there are special challenges for youth with disabilities from diverse cultures and youth with mental or developmental disabilities.

The increasing gaps between income levels for youth with disabilities and the general population add to the questions raised about the poor outcomes, including–Why are the national graduation rates static across a recent three-year period? Why are the graduation rates in the Southeastern states much lower than other regions of the country? What are the barriers to improved graduation-with-diploma rates? How many of the out-of-school youth (i.e., those who dropped out and those 'not known to continue') wind up on welfare rolls indefinitely? Although responses to these questions are not addressed, it is such questions that will need to be addressed by policy makers at the national, state and local levels in order to bring about coordinated systems reform that leads to more successful post-school employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

**Postsecondary Education**. Data about participation rates among youth and young adults with disabilities in postsecondary education have been uneven. Youth and young adults with disabilities have been less likely than their peers in the general population to participate in postsecondary education (OSEP, 1992: p. 77). However, according to the American Council on Education, the percentage of all freshmen entering college who reported disabilities quadrupled

between 1978 and 1991–from 2.2 percent to 8.8 percent of all freshmen (OSEP, 1992: p. xxiv). The Department of Education's NLTS data suggested that, among youth with disabilities, 16.5 percent enrolled in academic postsecondary programs while 14.7 percent enrolled in vocational postsecondary programs within 3 years after graduating from high school (OSEP, 1992: p. xxiv).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted a survey with 21,000 college students in the 1995-96 academic year. Of these, 6 percent reported having a disability. Among college students with disabilities, 29 percent had a learning disability, 23 percent had an orthopedic impairment, 16 percent had a non-correctable vision impairment, 16 percent were deaf or hard of hearing, and 3 percent had a speech impairment. Students with disabilities, when compared to non-disabled students, were more likely to be male, older, non-Hispanic white, and to be enrolled in sub-baccalaureate institutions, mostly public two-year colleges. They were less likely to have taken advanced placement courses in high school, and more likely to have remedial mathematics and English courses. In addition, as a group, they tended to have a lower high school grade point average and average Scholastic Aptitude Test scores than students without disabilities (Gajar, 1998; Horn & Bobbitt, 1999).

In a more recent survey, in October of 1999, the HEATH Resource Center published its data about freshmen college students with disabilities. One in 11, first-time, full-time freshmen entering college in 1998 self-reported a disability. This translates to about 9 percent of the total, or about 154,520 students who reported disabilities described as hearing, speech, orthopedic, learning, health-related, partially sighted or blind, or other conditions. According to the published data, there were some major differences between students who did and did not report disabilities. Among the findings reported in 1998 by freshmen with disabilities were that they were more likely than their peers to:

- Be male.
- Be 20 years or older.
- Come from families with slightly lower median incomes.
- Have earned C's and D's in high school.
- Have not met or exceeded the recommended years of high school study in math, foreign languages, and biological or physical sciences.
- Have spent more time between high school graduation and entry into college.
- Be attending two-year colleges.
- Predict that they would need extra time to complete their educational goals.
- Aspire toward vocational or associate degrees rather than bachelors or master's degrees.
- Rate themselves lower in measures of self-esteem, emotional health, and academic or physical ability.

Another 1999 report from the HEATH Resource Center entitled *College Freshmen with Disabilities: A Biennial Statistical Profile* indicated that the characteristics of the freshmen who participated in the most recent Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey were similar to those of students surveyed 7 years earlier. More specifically, the researchers learned that: The proportion of full-time college freshmen reporting disabilities (9 percent) remained unchanged between 1991 and 1998. Students with learning disabilities continued to be the fastest growing group; by 1998, two in five freshmen with disabilities reported a learning disability. In addition, a gradual shift became apparent in the enrollment patterns of freshmen with disabilities.

> Although freshmen with disabilities were still more likely than their nondisabled peers to enroll in two-year colleges, a higher proportion of students with disabilities were enrolling in four-year institutions in 1998 than had seven years earlier (p.29).

> Although freshmen with disabilities were more likely to report lower high school grades and to be starting college at older ages, their educational and career goals were generally similar to those of students without disabilities. When asked to rate their own talents, fewer students with disabilities than nondisabled students ranked themselves above average or higher on a wide range of abilities (pp. 29-30).

Behind the statistics of postsecondary education participation rates lies another type of data. These data relate to the real life experiences of youth with disabilities. They reflect the disincentives presented to youth and young adults with disabilities who want to enroll in and benefit from a postsecondary education. For example, in 1996, students with learning disabilities enrolled at Boston University (BU) brought a class action lawsuit in U.S. district court claiming discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal and state laws. The plaintiff group of students alleged that BU had discriminated against them by establishing unreasonable eligibility criteria for qualifying as a student with a disability, not providing reasonable procedures for evaluating their requests for academic accommodations, and instituting a blanket policy precluding course substitutions in foreign language and mathematics as academic accommodations. The BU case was, and is, illustrative of the national debate about the rights of qualified students with (learning) disabilities to receive academic accommodations and the rights of colleges and universities to establish academic standards. The circumstances surrounding the BU case have been, and still are, part of a growing ideology that perpetuates attitudinal barriers and prejudice toward many qualified individuals with (learning) disabilities in higher education. In August of 1997, federal district court Judge Patti Saris found that, in a number of significant respects, BU had violated the students' rights under the ADA and related laws (21 Mental & Physical Disability L. Rep 679, 1997).

For far too many students with disabilities, compliance with federal regulations regarding paying for and providing auxiliary aids for vocational rehabilitation (VR) clients with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary institutions has been hampered due to the lack of guidance on the issue from the U.S. Department of Education, and the refusal of some state agencies to share the cost associated with servicing students who need reasonable accommodations. The issue of who



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should pay for special services needed for VR clients with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary courses has been the subject of considerable debate since the passage of the (ADA) in 1990. Existing law required vocational rehabilitation agencies to pay for special services for their clients, but some agency officials argued that the ADA shifted the financial responsibility onto colleges and universities that enrolled VR clients. To resolve the issue, Congress included in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 language that called for the development of interagency agreements between state higher education institutions and other state entities to determine the appropriate balance of financial responsibility for servicing VR clients. However, regulations on implementing the law have not yet been issued by the Department of Education. Some states already have begun work to implement the new provision, while other state VR agencies have refused to discuss any shared financial responsibility agreement related to providing auxiliary aids to VR clients enrolled in postsecondary studies (Selingo, 1998). While this stalemate continues, VR clients who require auxiliary aids and supports to benefit from a postsecondary education will continue to suffer when their needs for accommodations are not met.

More recently, in another case, Duke University settled a disability-rights ADA complaint with the U.S. Justice Department, agreeing to make wide-ranging changes over the next 5 years to render its buildings and services more accessible to people with disabilities. Under the agreement, Duke must also pay $25,000 in civil penalties and $7,500 to a former Duke undergraduate, who filed the complaint in 1996. The student uses a wheelchair and graduated from Duke in 1997. In her complaint, she charged that a number of campus facilities-including dining halls, dormitories, academic buildings, and water fountains-were inaccessible to people with mobility impairments. Justice Department officials said the settlement marked their first agreement with a college on broad, campus wide accessibility issues (Hebel, 2000).

Unfortunately, legal experts indicated, such broad-based actions were likely to occur one institution at a time, rather than en masse, because the process of investigating a campus's compliance with the disabilities law is time-consuming.

These kinds of barriers to enrollment and on-campus support during students' college careers prevent far too many youth and young adults from pursuing postsecondary studies, increasing their knowledge and skill levels, and enhancing their marketability to potential employers. The barriers and obstacles must be removed.

**Social Security**

When Supplemental Security Income (SSI) was enacted in 1972, its main purpose was to assure a basic minimum income for needy aged, blind and individuals with other disabilities who, under the prior programs of federal grants to states, were subject to very disparate treatment across the nation because of great disparities among States in their financial capacity or willingness to provide such support. The prior law had provided federal funds to states for children who were blind, but not for other children with disabilities. The question arose whether the new federal SSI program should include children who were blind and children with other disabilities. Then as now, the rationale for including children in SSI is somewhat different from that for adults. Cash assistance for poor adults who are aged or have disabilities is justified because they lack the capacity to support themselves through their own earnings. That is true for all poor children. For low-income children with disabilities, however, there are added justifications for support. Their disabilities pose additional costs to their families and, if they do not have appropriate developmental supports when they are young, they are at high risk of relying on public support when they become adults.

In brief, there is a clear rationale and a compelling need for cash support to families with a child with a disability. The basic purpose of these benefits is to support and preserve the capacity of families to care for their children in their own homes by:

- Meeting some of the additional disability-related costs of raising a child with a disability;
- Compensating for some of the income lost because of the everyday necessities of caring for a child with a disability; and
- Meeting the child's basic needs for food, clothing and shelter.

Without these supports, children and youth with disabilities would be at a much greater risk of losing both a secure home environment and the best opportunity for integration into community life, including the world of work.

In August 2000, about 853,000 children who were blind and children with other disabilities under age 18 were receiving SSI benefits. These children and youth share two common realities: they have significant disabilities and very low incomes. Mental retardation is the primary diagnosis for a little more than one-third of the school-age children and youth who receive SSI. Many who receive this diagnosis are children and youth with learning disabilities or "mild" mental retardation. Others have significant physical or other mental disorders. The number of children and youth awarded SSI benefits grew rapidly between 1989 and 1993, but has since declined. The growth in 1989-93 is attributed to four factors: the 1990 Supreme Court decision in *Sullivan v. Zebley*, which changed the assessment of childhood disability and required that past claims which had been denied be reassessed; the update of the listings of disabling childhood mental impairments in 1990; legislatively mandated outreach activities by the Social Security Administration, as well as efforts by States and private organizations to enroll eligible children in SSI; and an economic recession in 1990-91 that caused more families whose children had disabilities to meet the program's low-income criteria. The rapid growth in the program has slowed. Fewer children and youth were awarded SSI disability benefits in 1994 than in 1993.

In recent years, however, an increasing number of youth and young adults with disabilities have applied for and enrolled in SSI or SSDI each year. According to the Social Security Administration in 1999, approximately 75,000 individuals between 18 and 24 years of age were awarded SSI or SSDI benefits, , and as of June 2000 about 355,000 persons aged 18-24 were receiving SSI or SSDI benefits. Of these about 36,000 were getting benefits from both programs. (Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 1999). Among SSDI recipients, less than one percent of recipients who continue to meet SSA's definition of disability ever leave the program to return to work (Ross, 1996).

Researchers and policy analysts have identified a number of federal policy barriers that operate as disincentives to people with disabilities – including youth and young adults with disabilities – to stay off of or leave the SSI/SSDI program. These federal policy barriers include: conflicting goals within Social Security programs; strict program eligibility requirements; loss of medical coverage; individuals may be financially worse off by working; complex, confusing and seemingly arbitrary rules about work incentives; lack of choice in vocational rehabilitation providers; and, lack of employer incentives to hire people with disabilities (DeJong & O'Day, 1997; General Accounting Office, 1996a, 1996b; Martin, Conley & Noble, 1995; National Council on Disability, 1997; O'Day, 1999). These barriers must be removed before employment and/or return-to-work rates among youth and young adults with disabilities can be expected to improve.

In summary, there are fundamental problems in the structure, process, and outcomes of transition and secondary education programs that feed into, and negatively impact postsecondary education, career training and employment outcomes. This situation is critical, demands our immediate attention, and must be corrected. The next sections present information gleaned from practice and research about what works and what should work in these areas.

## What Works

America faces an imposing but not impossible set of challenges in terms of the academic and work preparation of its youth and young adults, and their entry into the world of adulthood. This is as true for those who receive special education services as it is for students who are in general education. Public secondary schools are slowly beginning to recognize that general education must change. For example, the traditionally dominant purpose of American high schools – perform well on tests and get students admitted to a university – serves a small fraction of students, and many of them not very well when we consider that up to 50% of college freshmen often receive remediation in the basic skills. High schools that, in the past, have been organized around isolated academic disciplines, use a lecture-based format as the chief medium for providing instruction, and administer testing through pencil and paper formats are ineffective. We see that ineffectiveness in the increasing numbers of students who drop out of general education, and those who prematurely exit special education services. For those students who manage to graduate from high school and enter college, the little known truth is that very few of them actually graduate. The largest majority of them enter technical training, complete a year or two of career focused education at a community college or go directly into the workplace, or at least try to obtain work.

There is a pressing need to connect secondary school curricula and structure with the realities and demands of life beyond high school. If one of the primary purposes of high school – and transition planning, services and supports – is to successfully prepare young people for the adult world, then: (a) we should implement transition planning and service delivery mandates with fidelity, and (b) the high school experience should resemble the world of adulthood. The goals, accommodations, linkages, and services students incorporate into their transition plans must be adhered to and implemented in a timely manner. What we ask students to learn, how we ask them to learn it and how they are tested, should correspond to the ways in which they will demonstrate proficiency on the job, in lifelong education activities, in their families and in the

community. High school should position every graduate to successfully begin the next major steps in his or her life – whether going to a university, entering a community college or beginning a job or career with a future. A high school education, basically, should contribute towards competence in students' various roles as adults. In short, a student completing 12 years or about 14,000 hours of public education culminating in a high school diploma should not face the shock, frustration, and powerlessness upon entering the real world that many of today's graduates (and drop outs) face.

For those out-of-school youth and young adults, as well as for current SSI/SSDI beneficiaries, who would like to go on to post high school education and/or work but currently cannot, there is an intense need for: (a) access to proven transition practices; (b) access to individualized and effective postsecondary education services and supports, when needed; (c) access to reasonable accommodations at the workplace (e.g., personal assistance services, assistive technology); and (d) meaningful options for choice by individuals in the pursuit of education, career training, and individualized services and supports.

**Transition Planning, Services and Supports**

One of the best strategies for improving the quality of school programs and post school outcomes experienced by students is, unfortunately, the least often used. Carrying out the IDEA transition services requirements, and where appropriate, the Rehabilitation Act provisions for all who are determined eligible for services and supports, enables students with disabilities to move effectively from school to post-school independence and achievement.

In an effort to highlight promising and proven practices from the world of public education and to address continuing problems about shortcomings in public schools for students with educational disabilities, NCD produced *Improving the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Making Schools Work for All of America's Children* (1995). In

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addition to findings from national hearings, NCD provided a number of 'best-practices' examples from more than twenty of the nation's most prolific educational researchers and

practitioners. Among many of this report's conclusions, included in the sub-section on "Transition," were the following:

> In order to maximize a student's potential in a post school setting, the link between high school and the "real world" needs to be strengthened. Students should not be abandoned once they have been provided with some transitional services. Supports provided after graduation can guarantee that the skills learned in school will not be lost in new environments. At present, there are two options for students following graduation: finding employment or continuing their education. High schools can provide programs that make pursuing these choices realistic and viable. Usually, a joint effort between high schools and employers or postsecondary programs offers the best opportunity for success (p. 137).
>
> Stronger programs in the schools will ensure that their talents are cultivated as they enter work places and campuses. Rarely do parents and children think that postsecondary education is an alternative. This could be attributed to a lack of information concerning programs or a fear of failure in a new and strange environment (p. 139).
>
> One option for schools is to expose students to junior colleges and universities while they are still in high school. A program in Milwaukee brings special education students to a junior college for a day and allows them to see what college life is like. Familiarity is the key to encouraging students to pursue a postsecondary education. Trained personnel at both the high schools and postsecondary institutions help students apply to college and then create a college course schedule (p. 139).
>
> Many families and students perceive the cost of college to be an impossible obstacle. Family members testified that they had already spent large sums of money in acquiring a better education for their children in special education programs, indicating that they need information concerning the types of postsecondary financial aid available to them. Testimony reflected that the level of financial aid awarded to students with disabilities at the university level was disproportionately low when compared to the rest of the student body. Increased information from postsecondary programs would provide more students with disabilities with opportunities to access financial aid (p. 140).
>
> Another aspect of establishing stronger links to life after school is job training. Allowing students to learn job skills while still in school makes them employable upon graduation. In New York City, funds are available to local merchants who employ students from special education programs. The program simply reimburses the employer the amount of wages earned by the student. The student is able to work in his neighborhood instead of a sheltered environment, earning at least minimum wage. The student gains valuable work and social skills while at the same time learning the benefits and rewards of working. The employer, on the other hand, gains both extra productivity and valuable experience in employing a person with a disability, often changing coworkers' and customers' negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities (p. 140).

Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) provided other examples of successful practices. They examined employment and postsecondary education outcomes for youth with disabilities leaving secondary schools and studies of educational practices reporting high-quality outcomes. In their analytical considerations they included the then current initiatives in educational reform that emphasized the improvement of career-related outcomes for all students and the inclusion of youth with disabilities in regular classes. They found that while school and employment-related outcomes for youth with disabilities continued to be problematic when compared with their peers, two educational practices appeared to consistently align with higher-quality outcomes for students. In their opinion, the promising practices that merited attention in improving programs and in advancing the knowledge base included school supervised work experiences and functionally oriented curricula in which occupationally specific skills, employability skills, and academic skills are systematically connected for students. From their review of outcomes and best practices, they reported that the educational reform literature indicated that valued outcomes for all students were focusing more prominently on workplace and transition outcomes, and that educational practices supported with documented evidence from the secondary special education literature were viewed by many authors as promising directions for improving secondary education for all students.

Furthermore, in 1997, Blank and Harwell identified a number of practices that have shown promise for students, in general, for better connecting what happens in high school with what happens in the broader world beyond school. The promising practices identified included: authentic instruction; project-based learning; problem-based learning; service learning; school-based enterprises; apprenticeships; internships; career education; mentoring; and, career academies. For each of the practices, the authors provide a description of the approach, a rationale, examples, evidence of benefits, and bibliographic citations for those individuals who are interested to learn more about the particular practice(s).

More recently, a number of educational researchers (Anderson-Inman, Knox-Quinn & Szymanski, 1999; Aspel, Bettis, Test & Wood, 1998; Benz, Doran & Yovanoff, 1997; Blackorby, Hancock & Siegel, 1998; Donovan & Tilson, 1998; Doran & Benz, 1998; Fisher & Gardner, 1999; Harrington, 1997; Lehman, 1998; Lehman, Denniston, Tobin & Howard, 1996; Thomas & Bottersbusch, 1997; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; Wehman & Revell, 1997; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997) identified strategies as factors that can lead to successful post school outcomes, including increased earnings and the likelihood of succeeding in the workplace. The strategies were:

- integration of a strong vocational component into the curriculum before high school;
- inclusion in general education classes;
- career focused and on-the-job training while in school;
- inclusion of self-advocacy and self-determination skills in the curriculum;
- clarification of roles and responsibilities, and coordinated services among vocational, regular and special education teachers, and counselors;
- professional development activities, focused on providing all staff with transition-related skills and knowledge;
- assessment of needs before developing a student centered transition plan;
- interpersonal skills, and job-related skills training for students;
- supervised on-the-job training in the community with continuous support for both the employer and the student;
- involvement of students, parents, businesses, and community representatives in interagency transition teams;
- meaningful job placement experiences that provide living wages and career opportunities for youth with disabilities;
- expanding secondary transition programs for students ages 18-21 to include two and four year college campuses;
- coordination between school and post-school activities;
- provision of follow-up services until connection is made with adult services; and
- inclusion of assistive technology in the academic and work-based learning experiences.

And while educational researchers have identified a number of transition practices as factors linked to successful post school outcomes, the question arises – Why has widespread implementation of these identified practices not occurred? In their review of the literature on the post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities, Fabian, Lent & Willis (1998) indicated that many of the studies tended to look only at whether or not the youth was employed at the time of

the follow-up, were broad in scope, or were generally conducted at a single site which limited the universality of the study. While these researchers supported the notion that identifying and sharing information on promising practices is essential to effective transition and school-to-work efforts, they cautioned: "knowledge of 'general programmatic indicators' of successful outcomes is not sufficiently detailed to guide program improvement and policy decisions" (Fabian, Lent & Willis, 1998; p. 312). The same researchers also found that administrators and teachers tend to respond more favorably to research findings and the implementation of recommended practices from transition outcome studies that (1) identify specific circumstances under which research based interventions (i.e., describe the study participants, setting, conditions, and so forth) and strategies were used, and (2) result from multi-site evaluations. The researchers found that these results afforded critical information to administrators and practitioners for selecting programs and practices that they determined to be viable models for local implementation.

In 1999, the National Transition Alliance identified about 27 promising programs from 17 different states and practices that promote post-school outcomes for students with disabilities through inclusive school-to-work systems (Kohler & Troesken, 1999). Selections were made based on documented evidence of benefits to students including: improved skill levels, specific post-school experiences, and/or opportunities to participate in specific activities that were acknowledged to help foster improved post-school outcomes (e.g., career exploration or work-based education). The programs or practices identified included a variety of approaches and occurred in a variety of contexts. It should be noted that these 27 promising programs and practices from 17 different states represent "islands of excellence." That is, about half of the states from which those promising practices and programs are drawn have diploma graduation rates at or below 20 percent according to the 21st Annual Report to U.S. Congress on the IDEA.

The National School-to-Work, a joint initiative of the Departments of Labor and Education, has produced some noticeable results. School-to-Work has been implemented in

every state, and many states are moving toward sustainability. All 50 states have received a School-to-Work implementation grant and have formed local partnerships to implement School-to-Work activities. Evaluation and research data from local partnerships in 34 states and Puerto Rico indicate: (a) nearly 18 million students – including about 11 percent who have disabilities – in more than 36,000 schools are in the geographic areas served by these partnerships; (b) 2,600 post-secondary institutions are working with these partnerships; (c) nearly 178,000 employers are involved in School-to-Work activities, and 109,000 employers are providing work-based learning for students (MPR Associates, 1999; pp. 5, 6 & 21); (d) almost half of the states have enacted statutes that provide financial, personnel and programmatic support for School-to-Work initiatives after the transition from federal funding (National Conference of State Legislatures, 1999); (e) many states are developing post-federal funding strategies; seventy-one percent of all partnerships receive outside funds or contributions, more than half (53 percent) are receiving cash funds from outside sources, and 56 percent are receiving in-kind contributions from public entities (MPR Associates, 1999; pp. 31-32); (f) between 1997 and 1998, employers providing training and internships for teachers grew from 25,000 to 32,000; employers engaging in curriculum development increased from 20,000 to 21,600, and employers promoting or marketing School-to-Work rose from 59,000 to 74,000 (Mathematica Policy Research, 1999: p. 58, 80 & 102); (g) Over 46,000 businesses are working with partnerships in operation for four or more years, *seven and a half times* the 6,000 employers working with newer partnerships (MPR Associates, 1999; p. 29; (h) more students, particularly African American students and the students not typically bound for college, see a connection between their academic coursework and career interest. For students with no plans for post-secondary education, participation in academic classes they perceived as focused on their career goals doubled from 10 percent for seniors in 1996 to 20 percent for seniors in 1997 (*STW*. 1998; p. 71); and (i) approximately 90 percent of career academy students met their graduation requirements and 51 percent submitted



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college applications, compared with 75 percent of non-academy students who met their graduation requirements and 36 percent who submitted college applications (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1999; Executive Summary-12).

Finally, in a groundbreaking piece of research, Luecking (2000) produced a study that examined various participant, educational setting and work behavior variables and their relationship to work outcomes among youth with disabilities who participated in a highly standardized internship programs, called "Bridges...from school to work." The study involved the analysis of archival data collected in conjunction with the operation of the Bridges program from 1993 to 1997 in seven distinct school districts. The 3,024 participants in the program during the study interval represented a broad spectrum of disability, racial and other demographic settings. The sample sizes for the six, 12 and 24-month follow-up contacts were 983, 539, and 249 participants respectively. Luecking (2000) found that:

> "A high percentage of participants completed the 12 week internship (85 percent) and received offers of ongoing employment from their host companies (77 percent). Indicators for successful internship completion were insignificant across participant characteristics (i.e., primary disability, gender, race, and educational setting). Work behaviors, particularly attendance and hours worked, were predictors of successful performance. As time out of school increased there was more disparity in employment outcomes between disability and racial categories, and between those youth who were educated in segregated vs. integrated educational settings. Youth with emotional disabilities had notably poor post-school work outcomes, as did those youth educated in segregated educational settings. Wages, hours worked and benefits increased for workers as time out of school increased. Participants' employment outcomes suggest that, regardless of disability or demographic category, youth with disability can successfully perform work viewed by their employers as beneficial to their enterprise. Sustaining successful work performance beyond high school, however, poses a continuing challenge for many categories of youth (pp. iv-v).

## What Should Work

At the start of the 21st Century in America we face a series of challenges which include: (1) increasing secondary-aged students' access to relevant and rigorous curricula, and information technology, while also increasing the proportion of students who successfully complete a high school program as a result of the national investment in our public secondary schools; (2) expanding options for career and employment for youth and young adults who choose to work upon graduation from high school; (3) improving access to postsecondary educational experiences for students after exiting a secondary education program; (4) ensuring a range of educational and/or employment alternatives for out-of-school youth and young adults – i.e., those who do not complete a high school program; and (5) increasing the level of accountability of government funded programs for human service outcomes such as secondary and postsecondary education, career training and employment.

Interventions and 'fixes' to the transition problems that result in poor high school and post-school outcomes have been few in number and shallow in scope. This is true, despite the nature and extent of identified problems and barriers to successful transitions. Some recent federal programs and initiatives hold out the promise of addressing some of these problems. How these programs are to be targeted to benefit youth and young adults with disabilities, as part of the targeted consumer base, is unspecified and unclear.

A caveat is in order. The way that new youth programs and services are funded, regulated and held accountable can support or undermine state and local outcomes. Instead of just asking whether the Federal Government should use its funds to create more slots, improve training, enhance interagency coordination, or provide tax credits to business and industry, we should address:

- How could the Federal Government use its regulatory and accountability mechanisms to encourage high standards and achieve significant outcomes?

- What steps could the Federal Government take to encourage and ensure replication of the very best programs and practices?

- How could the Federal Government create intermediary organizations to promote more effective and efficient approaches for helping youth and young adults?

- How could the Federal Government encourage, perhaps even require, partnerships between formal service systems and community-based organizations?

- How could the Federal Government encourage states and local communities to combine what works to target defined areas or neighborhoods?

- What could the Federal Government do to create the political will to support youth interventions that may take up to two generations to achieve real results?

- And finally, how could we build and sustain a useful knowledge base to help practitioners along the way?

In light of the caveat offered, and the questions posed, the following "new" federal programs and initiatives are now discussed.

**The Youth Opportunity Movement**

The Youth Opportunity Movement is an initiative of the Department of Labor, working through local communities to build partnerships between government, community-and faith-based organizations and business leaders - and also with youth. On one level, it is a $1 billion investment in community programs to train and empower young people. On another level, it is about inspiring young people to abandon perceptions of barriers and seize opportunities to be the best they can be. On yet another level, it is a strong partnership with local leaders and local communities. All our young people need skills. All adults have a responsibility to give young people the skills they need. The purpose of the Youth Opportunity Movement is ' convince an entire generation that if they want to succeed, there is no barrier they cannot overcome.

The Youth Opportunity Movement is designed to offer a way to bridge gaps and break cycles that lead to poverty and despair. In conjunction with the recently enacted Workforce

Investment Act, the U.S. Department of Labor recently awarded $250 million in grants to 36 Youth Opportunity programs, ranging from $3 to $11 million a year, in 5-year cycles to communities. This funding enables communities to establish "one-stop" service centers where youth can access a wide range of services and resources, and to form community-wide partnerships. Effective strategies to help at-risk youth find employment must address personal, societal, academic and professional challenges. Job training alone is not enough: while young people need "hard" career-oriented skills, such as computer training, they also need "soft" skills, such as learning how to interview for a job. While various programs have succeeded in treating parts of the problem, the Youth Opportunity Movement will apply a "360º approach" by focusing on the whole person and engaging the whole community.

As discussed, it is unclear, however, whether and how youth and young adults with disabilities will reap the benefits from, and be enabled to fulfill the promise of, the "Yomovement." It is not clear that there are specific requirements and expectations for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the 36 communities recently awarded. While some grantees may have committed themselves, up front, to including people with disabilities from their communities in their proposal efforts, other communities did not. It is also not clear that any technical assistance provided to the 36 communities will include staff and resources that have a proven track record when dealing with people with disabilities. In the absence of clear and consistent direction from the Department of Labor, after-the-fact grant award assurances – on paper – of serving 'all' youth and young adults may remain just that…after the fact promises. In the absence of well-trained and experienced technical assistance, the support provided would be of little benefit to the communities.

**Workforce Investment Act: Youth Councils and One-Stop Centers**

The employment and training system is transitioning from the Job Training Partnership Act to the Workforce Investment Act. The Workforce Investment Act substantially reforms youth programming and places new emphasis on serving youth within a comprehensive

statewide workforce development system. Youth Councils will plan for the Workforce Investment Act comprehensive year-round system. The Act requires them to establish linkages with other organizations serving youth in the local area and to coordinate youth services. Services for youth under Workforce Investment Act shift to comprehensive services, with summer youth employment representing one of the ten required program elements that comprise a local area's year-round youth services strategy.

Another Workforce Investment Act strategy involves "One-Stop Centers." One-Stop Centers were developed to bring together employment and training services that work with all people in one place and make it easier for job seekers and employers to use these services. One-Stop Centers first began in the early 1990's as demonstration projects, and have expanded so there are now One-Stop Centers opening in most areas of the country. Services available through the One-Stop system include such things as: information about job vacancies, career options, and relevant employment trends; instruction on how to conduct a job search, write a resume, or interview with an employer; referral to training programs and unemployment insurance claim processing.

The One-Stop system is designed and required to meet the needs of all job seekers who want to use the system. This includes people with disabilities. The establishment of the One-Stop system across the country provides a wonderful opportunity for people with disabilities to receive services in new and different ways, right alongside everyone else. The expansion of the One-Stop Centers was authorized in the Workforce Investment Act that was signed in 1998, and contains several main principles that influence services, involving:

- Universal Access. Any individual should be able to go into a One-Stop and receive services called core services, to assist in making decisions about what career to pursue and in the actual job search.
- Streamlining services. Employment and training programs for all people should be brought together, and be easily accessible via One-Stop Centers.



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- Increased accountability. The One-Stop system is being evaluated based on how many people get jobs and the satisfaction of the customers.
- Empowering individuals. Customers should be given more information about services in order to make informed choices and have more control of their services.
- State and local flexibility. Local One-Stop systems can set up services in different ways to respond to the needs of their local community.

The Workforce Investment Act is a relatively new law and, in many areas, the Youth Councils and One-Stop system are just beginning. Individual states are developing plans for how they will implement the Workforce Investment Act. Formal implementation and subsequent evaluation(s) began in the summer of 2000. It remains to be seen whether, how, to what extent, and how well One-Stop Centers have an impact on the 70 percent unemployment rate among millions of people with disabilities ages 16-64 who are unemployed in this country.

**Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities**

On March 13, 1998, President Clinton signed an Executive Order which established the Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities with the mandate to "evaluate existing federal programs to determine what changes, modifications, and innovations may be necessary to remove barriers to employment opportunities faced by adults with disabilities" and review areas that include "reasonable accommodations, inadequate access to health care, lack of consumer-driven, long-term supports and services, transportation, accessible and integrated housing, telecommunications, assistive technology, community services, child care, education, vocational rehabilitation, training services, employment retention, promotion and discrimination, on-the-job supports, and economic incentives to work." The Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities' (PTFEAD) activities for youth with disabilities are addressed through its Sub-Committee on Expanding Employment Opportunities of Young People with Disabilities (Sub-Committee on Young People).

The Sub-Committee on Young People's recent report outlining federal agency activities include a set of comprehensive recommendations for interagency and intra-agency actions that, if followed by the respective agencies, could result in some improvements in the coordination of service delivery as well as outcomes for youth and young adults (PTFEAD, 1999). The current PTFEAD ends in 2002.

**Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act.**

On December 17, 1999, President Clinton signed the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (P.L. 106-170; Conference Report 106-478). The law takes significant steps toward removing some of the most serious barriers to work faced by people with disabilities by providing quality, affordable health insurance for people with SSI and SSDI who work and by making it easier for people to choose their own provider of employment services in the private or public sector.

The new law creates a Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program. Under the program, individuals with disabilities receiving SSI or Title II (SSDI) benefits may receive a "ticket" or voucher to obtain employment services of their choosing from within employment networks. Employment networks may include both state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and private and other public providers. Examples of employment services include vocational rehabilitation counseling, assistive technology or job coaching. A new payment system rewards employment providers for outcomes and long-term results through a choice of two payment systems: a) an outcome –based payment system that provides a percentage of the average monthly disability benefits for each month benefits are not payable to the beneficiary due to work; or b) an outcome-milestone payment system that also provides early payments based on the achievement of one or more milestones towards permanent employment. This provision will be phased in starting one year after enactment, with full implementation within three years.

The new law gives states two options to offer Medicaid coverage to people with disabilities (ages 16-64) who work: 1) states could allow individuals with disabilities to buy into Medicaid even if they are not eligible for SSI (because they make too much money working); 2) states may also cover people who continue to have a severe disability but who lose SSI or SSDI benefits because of medical improvement. Individuals covered under these options might be required to pay premiums on a sliding-fee scale based on income. States may require individuals with incomes above 250 percent of the federal poverty level to pay the full premium as long as it does not exceed 7.5 percent of their income. The effective date for this provision was October 1, 2000. Also effective October 1, the act allows Medicare coverage to be extended for individuals who receive benefits through Title II of Social Security (SSDI). Currently, disability payments stop when the individual earns $700 per month or more (after a nine-month trial work period). If the individual continues working, he/she can continue to receive Medicare for an additional 39 months, for a total of 48 months (four years). The new work incentives law provides for continued Medicare Part A coverage for four and one-half more years beyond the current limit, resulting in a total of eight and one-half years. When the full Medicare Part A coverage period runs out, the individual may still continue receiving Medicare by paying the premium.

The act establishes new protections for individuals who choose to go back to work. Effective January 1, 2001, Social Security cannot initiate a continuing disability medical review while the beneficiary is using a "ticket." In addition, effective January 1, 2002, returning to work will no longer automatically trigger continuing disability reviews. Continuing disability reviews will still be held on a regularly scheduled basis, however. The new law also establishes an expedited reinstatement of disability benefits. This will make it easier for an individual to regain eligibility for Social Security benefits in cases where that individual is unable to work

because of his/her disability. The request for reinstatement must be made within 60 months of termination. This provision is effective in January 1, 2002.

The new law requires the SSA to conduct an extensive demonstration program of a gradual reduction in Title II (SSDI) disability benefits as the individual's earnings increase. It will demonstrate the work incentive effect of reducing the benefit by $1 for every $2 the individual

earns, similar to the reduction made now in the SSI program. This is particularly beneficial to low-income workers for whom the loss of cash benefits is as much a barrier to work as the loss of health coverage. The law also requires the General Accounting Office to do several studies on existing work incentives. These studies would, among other things, assess the value of existing tax credit and disability-related employment initiatives under federal laws; evaluate the coordination of work incentives for individuals eligible for both SSDI and SSI; and examine the substantial gainful activity limit as a work disincentive.

The promise and potential of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act is much needed and long overdue. Among the millions of income beneficiaries, a significant number are youth and young adults with disabilities. Expectations are high. Some members of the disability community have spent a good deal of time thinking about the application of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act in the lives of the young people they know. The following sobering text summarizes some of that thinking. It comes in the form of an open story to the Internet community from Dr. Frank Bowe, a prominent disability advocate:

> "Nothing has been more frustrating for me, in 25 years of disability-rights advocacy, than the 1974 creation of Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This program, which offers a guaranteed minimum income designed to bring people up to the poverty level, has been undeniably helpful to millions of Americans with disabilities. It has also caused millions to forego the American dream, or at least think they had to.

All of my conflicting emotions about SSI surfaced over the past several weeks as I tried to help a former student of mine. Let me call him "Mike," a 25-year-old quadriplegic with a new master's degree. He got a job last September as a high-school teacher.

Mike needed SSI, and the Medicaid that came with it, to get his BA and MA degrees after injuring his spinal cord when he was 19 years old. He's grateful for it. Medicaid pays for the twice-daily attendant care he needs to get up every morning and get back to bed every night. Mike estimates that it would cost him about $1,000 a month if he paid the attendants himself. That would be, of course, in after-tax dollars. Putting it bluntly, he would fork over about half of his income for attendant care. "I'll do it," he told me. He loves teaching that much.

It is not just attendant care. Mike also has to pay for a lift-equipped van, which he needs to get to and from work and for all the other things people need transportation to do. Modified vans cost at least $40,000 and consume massive amounts of gas and oil. With Medicaid paying his attendant care expenses, he can cover his monthly transportation costs (barely). Mike knows that, now that he's working, he risks losing SSI and the Medicaid that comes with it.

He asked me to help him identify his options. The first one, obviously, was one of the health insurance plans offered by the school that employs him. Alas, none of the available plans includes home health care services such as attendant care. Even if one did, Mike can't switch to it until October, long after his expected loss of Medicaid coverage.

Maybe I'm more upset about this than he is. It's not right. All my working life I have tried to make it possible for people like Mike, who want to work, to work. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (PL 106-170) is supposed

to help. But it doesn't help now, when Mike needs it, and I'm not sure it will even help him later. Beginning in October 2000, this law permits states to allow people who "make too much" (that is, earn more than about $20,000 a year) to buy into Medicaid. There's no guarantee that the state where Mike lives will elect that option. Even if it did, Mike makes over $20,000 a year as a teacher. The act also changes some federal rules. After December 2000, people who lose SSI benefits because of earned income can request reinstatement. But Mike faces the loss of benefits much earlier than that.

What am I supposed to tell Mike? Should I tell him that I admire his love of teaching, but that he started teaching too early? That he should quit now? That some time next year, if his state passes a law allowing him and others like him to make more money and still get Medicaid, he could again become a teacher - but only if he makes under $20,000 a year? How is he supposed to live on that income?

I can't bring myself to tell Mike these things."

**Demonstration Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a High Quality Education.**

Because of significant changes in education laws for people with disabilities, the proportion of first-time, full-time freshmen with disabilities attending college increased more than threefold between 1978 and 1994, from 2.6 percent to 9.2 percent. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that 17 percent of students attending higher education programs in this country have a disability. Yet research indicates that students with disabilities are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than their peers. Moreover, when students with disabilities attend postsecondary programs, they are more likely to attend two-year or vocational programs rather than four-year, degree-granting institutions and when they do attend, they are less likely than their peers to persist in these programs and graduate.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education has initiated a discretionary grant program to increase the number of students with disabilities who persist in attaining a four-year degree. Approximately 20 grants were funded in 1999 that provide technical assistance and professional development activities for faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education, in order to provide a quality education to students with disabilities. This program supports technical assistance and professional development activities for faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education to improve their ability to provide a quality postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Demonstration Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a Quality Higher Education is authorized under Title VII, Part D of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998. This program was funded for the first time in FY 1999 at $5 million.

Grantees in the program will develop innovative, effective, and efficient teaching methods and other strategies to enhance the skills and abilities of postsecondary faculty and administrators in working with disabled students. Activities include:

- In-service training
- Professional development
- Customized and general technical assistance workshops
- Summer institutes
- Distance learning
- Training in the use of assistive and educational technology
- Synthesizing research related to postsecondary students with disabilities

Grantees will also disseminate information from their grant activities to other institutions of higher education.

It is not clear whether or not there will be an independent evaluation of these demonstration programs. In addition, the Department of Education's long-term commitment to any expansion of this initiative is unclear. Similarly, it is not clear what, if any, relationship exists between the different federal agencies that serve youth and young adults with disabilities, and this higher education initiative. It remains to be seen, therefore, what will become of this worthy postsecondary education effort.

## Conclusions and Recommendations for Action

NCD's analysis of transition and post-school outcomes has identified continuing gaps among youth and young adults with disabilities, and between them and their peers. There has been little noticeable progress made in the past decade in terms of students exiting special education services with high school diplomas. There has been slight progress in terms of young adults' entry into community and 4-year colleges. There has been negligible progress in the numbers of youth and young adults who have benefited from real life work experiences that could have prepared them for employment following their high school careers. There is little discernable progress in the overall numbers of youth and young adults who have successfully entered the real world of work. Overall, there is still a fragmented system of youth development – within and across youth initiatives. A few recent initiatives have demonstrated success in building partnerships among different agencies, the public and private sectors, and federal-state-local governments; many initiatives have yet to fulfill their promise.

Barriers to successful post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities have persisted, despite federal legislation, research initiatives, and evidence of promising practices. Based on the available data and evidence from research and public information NCD finds that:

1) Actual transition plans and implementation do not reflect the intent of the federal laws and initiatives, such as the IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments;

2) There is a disparity between transition service needs and the services provided to youth by schools and community service agencies that are federally funded;

3) Youth with disabilities and their families are not provided adequate opportunity to become actively involved in transition services planning;

4) Schools need additional resources for adequate transition services that youth with disabilities require to prepare them for successful post school outcomes;

5) The application of information technology in the preparation of youth with disabilities for post-secondary education and employment is inadequate to meet their needs;

6) Research based strategies and promising practices have been defined but are not widely adopted or implemented and are not seen as user friendly or to have wide generalizability;

7) Secondary and post-secondary education systems fail to provide youth with disabilities with consistent, individualized, and appropriate access, equity and quality learning experiences to support their completion of education and movement to meaningful employment;

8) Vocational rehabilitation and other community service providers have limited involvement in the transition process on a national scale;

9) Ethnicity and cultural diversity issues impacting post school outcomes are not appropriately considered by persons involved in transition planning, such as respect for differences or cultural awareness, information dissemination and resources;

10) Youth in rural areas, including tribal communities, experience additional and significant challenges that have not been addressed, including geographic isolation, transportation and access needs, as well as resolution of government to government issues;

11) The application of work incentives for youth with disabilities receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Income has been inadequate to promote greater participation in post secondary education and employment; and

12) Discrimination, differential attitude toward youth with disabilities, and lack of access to appropriate accommodations persist as barriers to post secondary school outcomes.

Among the changes needed in America to address these serious issues is a serious and protracted emphasis on the positive skills and attributes of youth with disabilities, and the need to promote business involvement in the educational lives of students with disabilities.

An analysis of the available research and public use data conveys both "positive and negative news." On the positive side: Youth with disabilities are protected by both long-standing and more recent federal laws that prohibit routine institutionalization without options, denial of enrollment and wholesale segregation in public schools, and outlaw broadly overt discrimination in the workplace. The scope and use of language in the federal laws and their accompanying regulations make it clear that youth with disabilities are entitled to the same civil and human rights afforded their peers.

On the negative side: There are longstanding and persistent challenges that are the bases for federal, state, and local actions for systemic reform. Despite some advances in research, education, and disability rights policy and limited gains toward inclusion in educational and workplace settings, national rates of high school completion with a diploma and student progression to post secondary school and employment for youth with disabilities are relatively low. These rates are even lower for the majority of youth with disabilities from diverse cultures.

Students with disabilities continue to drop out of school at higher rates than the general student population and are less likely to enter post-secondary education or to be employed at rates equal to those of their peers. Youth with disabilities who are from diverse cultural groups, as well as youth with mental disabilities and youth with developmental disabilities remain the most under-employed of all young people.

Documented models of multidisciplinary, coordinated, and accountable service systems that meet "local" requirements are desperately needed to close the gaps between high school transitions, post school outcomes in education and employment for youth with disabilities and the general population. In too many communities, transition to post school education and employment is largely uncoordinated across the existing federal-state-local (including tribal community) entity initiatives.

At the federal level few agencies demonstrate effective internal communication translated into external collaboration with other agencies to meet the needs of our nation's youth, whether the current laws mandate such coordination or not. A shift away from stovepipe methods of operation is needed. At the state and local community levels, few entities that receive federal funding to assist youth transition from secondary to post-secondary settings (e.g., education, human and social services, and labor) are effectively collaborating to meet individual needs. Local entities, in particular, need to address the funding constraints, open methods of communication and replace largely isolated agency functioning with realistic plans for joint responsibilities.

High school staff, business, and community partners need to work closely with youth and their families to prepare for productive employment to the maximum extent possible. Youth with disabilities need more intense efforts that help them participate successfully in the general curriculum, large-scale assessments, and workplace by providing them the necessary supports



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and appropriate accommodations. Preparation for productive employment also needs to include self-advocacy training and a sense of self-determination that fit within the context of diverse cultural traditions. Under IDEA, the Federal Government required in 1990, for the first time, that all students with disabilities receive transition services by the age of 16 and the IDEA 1997 amendments set the mandatory age as 14 for including transition planning related to course work for vocational preparation.

Also, no later than at age 14, teenagers on SSI/SSDI, together with parents and other members of their IEP teams must develop transition plans geared toward course content. Where appropriate, they should begin to articulate and document career goals. The plan would set a track for the child's educational goals for the remainder of secondary school and should include: (1) academic preparation for attending college; or (2) vocational preparation that includes survey courses as well as concentration in the target vocational goal; and (3) preparation for life skills and independent living as adults. Transition services planning should also provide information about Social Security work incentives that can be used to pursue vocational goals. While they are pursuing their goals for work or further education after high school, young people should have assurance of SSI/SSDI benefit security until they reach age 18, even if they begin to demonstrate work skills. Transition services planning should include explaining the requirement that young people receiving SSI/SSDI will have a continuing disability review, subject to the adult disability criteria, when they reach age 18. Finally, transition services planning and implementation should include explaining to students and families the new features of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Investment Act that apply to youth and young adults with disabilities.

In the spirit of hope and with the expectation that many segments of American society have a stake in ensuring successful transitions for youth and young adults, NCD makes the following recommendations for actions at the national, state and local levels.

**Recommendations to the President and the U.S. Congress**

1. Establish a timeline for reports to Congress and the public on the review, revision and/or refinement of all relevant federal agency compliance and enforcement of programs that involve youth and young adults with disabilities. Include that each agency must provide clear and distinct incentives for compliance and enforcement, and specific and immediate sanctions for noncompliance and lack of enforcement, whenever necessary.

2. Require that all federal agencies redesign and/or redirect regional grants, contracts and/or cooperative agreements that are not producing results for youth and young adults with disabilities in secondary education, career training and employment preparation, and post-secondary education areas. Establish a timeline for carrying out the work and reporting the revisions.

3. Direct the Department of Education and the Social Security Administration to work together to: (a) set forth clear guidelines on the interpretation of the definitions of common terms in the federal laws impacting youth transitioning from high school; and (b) jointly fund and commission a national study for review and analysis of the SSI program purposes and the IDEA program purposes in relation to transitioning youth and young adults. One outcome of that study could be the design a of a combined program with links to work incentive programs and other efforts that can lead to greater self-sufficiency for youth and young people with disabilities.

4. Ensure that the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Interior, and Labor, the Small Business Administration, Health Care Financing Administration, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Social Security Administration develop and implement actions needed to build and reinforce data–and information-sharing crosswalks within and across executive, legislative, and judicial branch agencies regarding the implementation of programs that involve youth and young adults with disabilities.

5. Ensure that the interagency coordination among the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Interior, and Labor, the Small Business Administration, Health Care Financing Administration, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Social Security Administration promote the infusion of knowledge about what works regarding transition and post-school services and supports for youth and young



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adults within and across all areas of federal, state, and local governments, public-private partnerships focusing on school and workplace improvements, and among all of America's citizens. Collect and disseminate timely and useful data and information about successful and unsuccessful strategies for youth and young adults with disabilities. Information needs to be meaningful to youth with disabilities, their families and the general public. Designate the President's Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities Subcommittee on Expanding the Employment of Youth with Disabilities for the leadership of this effort.

6. Ensure that all Department of Education and Department of Labor youth initiative grants, programs, and initiatives include dollars and resources for individuals with disabilities. A first step should authorize the Department of Education to implement a post-secondary education initiative that incorporates targeted scholarships and/or loans for youth and young adults with disabilities. Require that the initiative will provide effective outreach recruitment, relevant follow-along supports, and reasonable financial terms for repayment, when necessary.

7. Promote public policies through the Departments of Commerce and Labor that are supportive of employers. This includes setting policies and designing programs that employers perceive as requiring the least amount of red tape, paperwork, and direct government involvement into their business.

8. Ensure that all federal agencies have viable procedures that are implemented to provide cross-agency training on a consistent and timely basis when new federally funded youth initiatives are introduced.

**Recommendations to State, Local, and Community Entities**

1. Document successful examples of IDEA (transition services) implementation at the individual-level, school-level, and system-level, and share those examples with other educators, students, parents, advocates, and other interested parties.

2. Infuse real life work, volunteer opportunities, and lifelong education information and experiences throughout school systems' secondary curricula.

3. Develop and implement reasonable transition plans, per IDEA, for all students regardless of the nature and/or extent of their services and support needs.

4. Actively resist the temptation to judge IDEA's transition services requirements as strictly technical compliance activities. Use the service requirements and mandated time frames as benchmarks for student planning, timing of local services, and leveraging of community resources.

5. Encourage the development of transitions, apprenticeships, internships, and mentoring programs between schools and businesses–and between out-of-school youths and businesses–that realistically incorporate expectations of educational and industrial productivity among participating youth and young adults with disabilities.

6. Increase opportunities for 'local intermediaries' as brokers or enablers that promote individualized transition planning and implementation, as well as promoting transition partnerships among relevant segments of communities.

7. Provide increased access to relevant assistive technology and telecommunications in schools, community centers, libraries, and other neighborhood centers for youth and young adults with disabilities.

8. Provide incentives for success--in terms of transition outcomes for youth--to schools, to Centers for Independent Living, and to local intermediaries.

9. Identify and remove state/local (policy) barriers to, and disincentives for, successful transitions as youth with disabilities move from secondary education programs to postsecondary education and/or the world of work and visa versa.

**Recommendations to the Disability Community**

1. Expect that all publicly-funded education and employment service systems will fully and faithfully comply, with fundamental IDEA, Rehabilitation Act, School-to-Work Act, Higher Education Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Work Investment Act, Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, and other legislative mandates as they relate to the education and/or employment of youth and young adults with disabilities.

2. Build coalitions both with other disenfranchised populations and the larger population to promote the full inclusion of all youth and young adults into the educational/ employment mainstream of American society.

3. Seek state legislature support for full funding of all education services, including special education.

Implementation of the recommendations in this report will move our country's youth with disabilities into the new millennium as adults better prepared for independence and full participation in society. NCD urges the President and the Congress to ensure that the necessary tools are provided to today's youth who will shape our nation's future.

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